



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Pew: Maryland is Top-Ranked State for Children's Dental Care

O'Malley/Brown Administration to Build on Progress

Report card comes four years after 12 year-old died from untreated toothache

Baltimore, MD (May 24, 2011) - A national 50-state report card on children's dental health gives Maryland an 'A' grade for children's dental health and identifies the state as its top-performer in the nation. Maryland is the only state to meet or exceed seven of eight key benchmarks set by the Pew Center on the States. State officials vowed today to continue the momentum and improve access to dental care for more Maryland kids.

"In Maryland we are committed to preventing avoidable tragedies such as the loss of Deamonte Driver, a 12 year old Maryland child who passed away in 2007 from a toothache that went untreated," said Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley. "We've made sure that government works with our partners in the private sector and with our teaching hospitals so that dental care and oral health education is available in every jurisdiction statewide."

The report reveals some areas in which Maryland stands out from other states:

- Maryland has one of the best rates of any state (70.7%) for the reimbursements paid to dentists who serve Medicaid-enrolled children. A reimbursement rate this high enables dentists to cover their operating costs, encouraging more of them to treat Medicaid-enrolled kids.
- No state does a better job than Maryland at providing fluoridated water to more of its residents (99.8%) whose homes are connected to public water systems. Studies prove that fluoridation reduces tooth decay by 18 to 40 percent.

"Maryland is making more and better oral health services available," said Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D., Secretary of Maryland's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. "Our oral health agenda in 2011 is focused on the fact that we can accomplish even more."

Since the death of Deamonte Driver, Maryland's congressional leadership has played a critical role in support of expanded childhood dental care both in Maryland and nationwide. Congressman Elijah Cummings, Senator Barbara Mikulski, Senator Ben Cardin, and

Congressman John Sarbanes have led the fight for better childhood dental care. Among many achievements, Team Maryland has produced greater funding for oral health education and dental work force expansion through provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

“I am so happy that Maryland’s commitment to dental health, particularly in the lives of our children, has been recognized,” Congressman Cummings said. “However, we cannot be happy with this plateau. We must never stop in our pursuit of better dental health for all of our children.”

Nationwide, more than 16 million children go each year without seeing a dentist. The director of the Pew Children’s Dental Campaign echoed this view. “An A does not stand for ‘all done’,” said Shelly Gehshan, the campaign’s director. “It means a state has the key ingredients in place, but it still needs to monitor progress and explore new ways to improve children’s access to dental care.”

Pew’s report, *The State of Children’s Dental Health: Making Coverage Matter*, comes four years after the tragic, dental-related death of Deamonte Driver, the Prince George’s County boy whose untreated toothache spread into a brain infection. An \$80 tooth extraction could have saved Deamonte’s life, but his mother did not have private dental insurance and the family’s Medicaid coverage had lapsed.

This report is the second time that Pew has assessed and graded all states on their dental health policies for kids. To view Pew’s fact sheet on Maryland and learn more details about the state’s progress on oral health, visit www.pewcenteronthestates.org/dental/makingcoveragematter.

To learn more about Maryland’s oral health programs, visit <http://dhmh.maryland.gov/fha/>

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